



THE BACKGROUND OF PEOPLE TO PEOPLE

STUDENT AMBASSADOR PROGRAMS

Before Dwight D. Eisenhower became president of the United States of America, he was Allied Commander in Europe during World War II. Memories of the horrors of warfare would haunt Eisenhower for the rest of his life. During his presidency, the United States and the Soviet Union were waging a Cold War, a nuclear arms race which led to fear, suspicion, and misunderstanding between the two nations.

Fearful that the world might eventually destroy itself, Eisenhower saw the need for extraordinary efforts by ordinary citizens to resolve their differences in order to prevent that. He believed that if people of different countries came together and learned from one another, they would promote peace better than governments could. That's why he founded People to People in 1956, in an attempt to bring about peace through understanding. By giving ordinary citizens an opportunity to talk face to face, share activities, and learn about each others' cultures, Eisenhower hoped to build bridges and solve differences to find a way to live in peace. People to People represents the peak of President Eisenhower's lifelong crusade for world peace.

Eisenhower's dream was to have people realize that while we are all very different, our values, goals, and desire for life are very much the same. He believed if people could come into each others' homes, schools, or places of worship and see how families live, how food is prepared, how they worship, what they love and care about, and how they live, this dream could be realized.

In January of 1956, President Eisenhower held an international conference at the White House to meet with the top 100 business leaders in the United States to help him form the organization to be called People to People. They formed forty-two committees that would help people from different nations come together for cultural exchange. Some of the first formed included a music committee, a sports committee, a letter writing committee, a committee for a floating hospital to help others around the globe, and a committee for care of the disabled.

Two men at this White House conference played an important role in making this program a success. Those two great Americans were Walt Disney and Joyce C. Hall, founder of Hallmark cards. These leaders knew how to create and share positive visual images and written expressions. They knew how to help people see each other in a more positive light and dedicated much of their work to doing so.

Walt Disney created the "It's a Small World" attraction after his participation in the People to People International White House conference. Since then, it has introduced over 250 million people to the concept that we live together in "one small world." One of Disney's dreams was that music, animation, and exposure to the positive images in the minds of the world's children would help viewers see people of other nationalities in a more positive way, while still respecting the concepts and principles of their own families.

How wonderful that the original ideas discussed in 1956 still survive today! People to People International Community Chapters, Sister Cities, Citizen Ambassador Programs, and the Student Ambassador Programs in which you are involved were so successful that they took on lives of their own. Furthermore, all who have been involved with People to People have benefited in some way. The student who goes abroad gains new knowledge and awareness by being exposed to other lifestyles, not to mention the lasting friendships formed. It is this type of personal growth that is the fundamental foundation of People to People.

"I believe the people want peace, indeed, I believe that they want peace so badly that the governments will just have to step aside and let them have it."

— Dwight D. Eisenhower in British Radio Address

Although the Cold War is over, the need for cultural exchange remains. More than 400 armed conflicts take place daily. The world spends more money each day on new weapons and defense systems than the total amount spent for arms during World War I.

Is there a need for a People to People program? Will it make a difference? This is a decision that each individual must make. Were Dwight Eisenhower, Joyce Hall, and Walt Disney dreamers? Or, can one person's individual effort or contacts between private citizens make a difference? When people believe they can make a difference, they usually do. When they believe that the knowledge and understanding gained from exposure to the beliefs of others can change their lives, it usually does. An ordinary citizen can change the world for the better and in so doing, become a part of something extraordinary. Eisenhower believed this, and the success of People to People over the past 50 years is proof that he was right.